

Eco-tourism development in north Andros, Bahamas

Title

The Bahamas National Trust (BirdLife in the Bahamas) pursues community engagement to develop ecotourism enterprises and wildlife management in north-east Andros, Bahamas. This critical habitat hosts the globally threatened Bahama Swallow *Tachycineta cyanoviridis*, Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus* and Rock iguana *Cyclura cyclura cyclura* and includes four small national parks with limited management. The unprotected habitat is joined by two (2) Important Bird Areas, namely, Stafford Creek to Andros Town and Owenstown (abandoned). Andros, being a short and regular flight way from the capital Nassau, has a huge ecotourism potential but lacks current infrastructure.

Early work supported by the European Union led to the planning for an eco-tourism training center. Infrastructure developed for the Blue Holes National Park has led to a partnership with Bahamas Ferries and the Parks Pal Program which take school groups on day trips to the park. Building on these successes the Bahamas National Trust and in collaboration with BirdLife International (with financial support from the Aage V Jensen Charity Foundation) has developed the Blue Holes National Park, the flagship park in Central Andros. The community has received training to undertake conservation activities as preventing disturbances and habitat clearance, monitoring and managing hunting activities. This Local Conservation Group is being evaluated as a model to extend to other Bahamian Important Bird Areas.

A draft Management Plan for the Blue Holes National Park is in the process of being completed, while installation of a boardwalk and viewing deck, placement of relevant signage and the layout of walking/nature trails through the coppice has enhanced the attractiveness of the park. The Central Andros? community has been having a great exposure to environmental education through brochures, fact sheets, posters and the celebration of the Crabfest which is held in Andros during June each year. Experience exchanges were undertaken through three field trips for members and non-members from New Providence to Andros. These events provided much interaction between residents and visitors. Developing the ecotourism potential in the Blue Hole National Park highlighted it as a national asset and increased the ecotourism value of Andros.